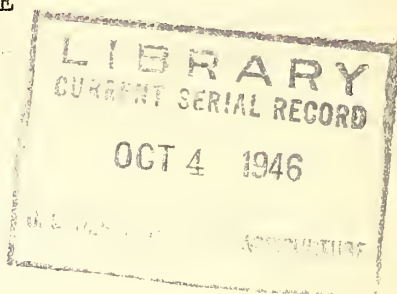


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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
Agricultural Research Administration
Bureau of Animal Industry



RAISING MARTENS IN CAPTIVITY 1/ 2/

Martens are active, hardy animals that tame readily and make interesting pets. In captivity they may attain an age of 10 years or more.

Martens vary greatly in color and in quality of fur. When prime the fur should be thick and soft. Silkeness and softness of the guard hairs and fullness of the underfur, as well as size are important points to be considered in the pelt. The most desirable skins are very dark--not black, but a dark chocolate. The finest, dark wild martens come from northern British Columbia and Alaska. Furriers assort the pelts into grades ranging from extra dark to pale. Because martens are scarce and produce pelts worth several times those of minks, animals sold as breeders command correspondingly higher prices than do the minks.

FOOD

Martens in the wild feed largely on rabbits, squirrels, mice, birds, insects, and wild fruits and berries. In captivity they relish milk, bread, cooked cereals, table refuse, meat scraps, and cooked fruits. Experiences of commercial fur farmers indicate that martens thrive on a well-balanced mink ration. Excessively fat or spoiled meat should never be fed. The rations may be supplemented frequently with fresh whole milk, or occasionally with a raw egg or fruit. Food consumption may vary from 5 to 8 ounces a day per animal. Care should be taken to give the martens only as much feed as they will eat immediately, for overfeeding is as injurious as underfeeding. Excess food is often carried away and stored in nest boxes or corners of the pens and if eaten after decomposing may cause food poisoning. Females with young should always be fed twice a day; others may be fed once or twice a day as convenient. Fresh water should be supplied daily.

1/ Fishers are cared for in much the same way.

2/ Formerly Wildlife Leaflet 243 issued in April 1945 by the Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior.

PENS

Pens should be placed where they will be partially shaded by trees but where the animals may occasionally enjoy a sun bath. Each marten should have a pen and a nest box to itself. Convenience and economy require that pens be built in a series, which may be either single or double. Large pens are necessary to these active animals. They should be at least 6 feet long, 6 feet wide, and 8 feet or more high. Pens 16 feet high, which allow this arboreal animal more opportunity to climb, have proved successful. A roof to keep out excess rain or snow is sometimes desirable. Covered pens aid in developing a darker fur, but a pale marten can never be transformed into a dark one. The floor should be made of rock or concrete or of 1 inch hexagonal wire netting, 16 gage, galvanized after weaving, and should be covered with sand or sandy loam (not clay) to a depth of 3 or 4 inches. The walls and top may be made of 1-inch-mesh wire netting, No. 16 wire or larger, galvanized after weaving. A section of a tree, with branches, set in each pen will be appreciated by these animals.

NEST BOXES

Nest boxes should be weather-proof and so placed as always to be in the shade. One type consists of two compartments, the entry to the inner, or nest chamber, being through the outer room, which is so designed as to exclude light and drafts of air from the nest. The doorways should be about 5 inches wide and 6 inches high. Marten nest boxes, which are similar to those used for minks but with the entrances much larger, are attached 5 or 6 feet off the ground in a corner of the pen. These boxes are about 12 inches long, 12 inches wide, and 18 inches high, and have a circular entrance hole 4 or 5 inches in diameter centered 5 inches from the top. Nest boxes should be detachable from the pens and so constructed that they can be opened for cleaning. Bedding material of grass or fine hay should not contain burrs or chaff or any other thing that might damage the fur.

BREEDING

The normal breeding season of martens is in summer, usually between the middle of July and the third week in August. From experiments conducted at the United States Fur Animal Experiment Station, Saratoga Springs, N. Y., it has been determined that the gestation period ranges from approximately $8\frac{1}{2}$ to 9 months (259 to 276 days). After fertilization and early development of the eggs there occurs a period of delayed implantation, so there are no visible signs of a fetus until about 7 months after mating. Although martens are often kept in pairs, the males are polygamous. Females may mate a number of times during the breeding season. The male should be taken to the female's pen, as females are inclined to be timid in strange surroundings. The young are whelped during the latter part of March and April, and it is best not to examine them until 3 or 4 weeks after whelping. They should be weaned at 8 or 9 weeks in order that the mother may regain good physical condition for the next mating season. Sexual maturity is not ordinarily reached in either sex until after the animal is 2 years of age. Two adults of the same sex should never be penned together during the mating season as they may fight savagely.

DISEASE AND SANITATION

Diseases are easier to prevent than to cure. Sick martens should be isolated from healthy ones and from each other. Animals suffering from colds or pneumonia should be kept warm in dry and well ventilated quarters. Digestive disturbances are usually the result of feeding spoiled or otherwise unwholesome food, and such disorders commonly respond favorably to a change in diet. The feeding of eggs, fresh horse meat, and liver are frequently helpful in these cases.

Wounds should be given antiseptic treatment.

Insect pests harmfully affect the health and well being of caged animals. Fleas breed in crevices and debris in nest boxes and dark corners. Cleaning the pens and spraying them with ordinary insecticides at frequent intervals will control such vermin. Lice and mites which reproduce on the animal's body may be controlled by dusting insect powder directly on the fur.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Be sure to observe each animal every day. Examine nests frequently and replace soiled nest-box material. Keep feed and water pans clean. Attend to the animals at the same hour each day. Tame them by remaining in their sight as much as possible and by inducing them to take food from the hand.

